Miles Hale, MMR #90

My journey in model railroad land began like many children of the baby boomer generation. An “S” scale train set that my dad and I shared on a 5 x 9 Ping Pong table top. We had some accessories and it ran well, I still have the original engine and many of the cars. It is ironic that after so many years I have returned to “S” scale cars for my current On30 railroad.

But I should talk about my journey to MMR first. After my return from Vietnam in the US Air Force I was stationed at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. There was a base hobby shop and it had an HO train layout in the attic of the building. The base commander liked the idea of the base hobby shop for the returning wounded service men, mostly because of the many hospitals in the San Antonio area. It was a good place to recoup and make new friends and reasons for going forward. It was at the shop that I met John Lowrance, MMR, and our friendship has continued to today. The hobby shop offered a very unique place to learn about model railroading because the “members” of the group were from so many different parts of the country and we were all in a learning environment. Everybody had a way of doing things and experimentation was the name of the game.

The element that got me involved in the NMRA and the Achievement Program was the NMRA Lone Star Region convention that was being held in San Antonio in 1972. I found a whole new group of modelers in the San Antonio Model Railroad Club (SAMRA). Not long after I started modeling in “N”, I went to the LSR 1973 convention with a couple of models from the NMRA magazine. I won a couple of prizes at the contest and the rest as they say is history. The contest and model building had hooked me for good!

I changed scales to HO and HOn3 when I moved from San Antonio back to Kansas City, Missouri, upon my discharge from the service. I was in the local hobby shop (Spotlight Railroad) when I talked to “Herald the Beard” who was an early contributor to Model Railroader Magazine. He asked me what I was modeling and I told him if it looked good I was going for it. Two things came from our conversations. One: pick a prototype, Herald said the manufacturers will make many more models than you can collect, so focus. Richard Schafer told me about the Uintah Railway and I picked it to follow. The second thing I learned from being in the “S” scale club in KC. I asked why do you do S. They liked the size. They were older and seeing smaller scales was difficult, putting details on small scales was not easy, and above all they were all excellent modelers and needed the size to work their magic.

I got to thinking about what they were saying and decided to make an even bigger leap and just go to “O”. I have not regretted the decision. I went actually to On3 and now to On30. I can model structures and details in O and yet model narrow gauge with the On30 engines and cars.

All this time I was contest modeling and writing articles for Model Railroader and Craftsman. I have several covers on both these and other model railroad magazines. The contest wins and articles made for a self guided path through the NMRA’s MMR program. I earned MMR #90 in 1981. The path for me was Motive Power, Cars, Structures, Scenery, Civil, Electrical, Author, Volunteer, and Dispatcher.

The journey continues and constantly allows for new friends to be added to my list of visitors and people who have helped me and that I have helped along the way. The comradery of this hobby is virtually limitless because we incorporate so many disciplines in the field of model railroading. I hope all will find the journey a new horrizon every day!